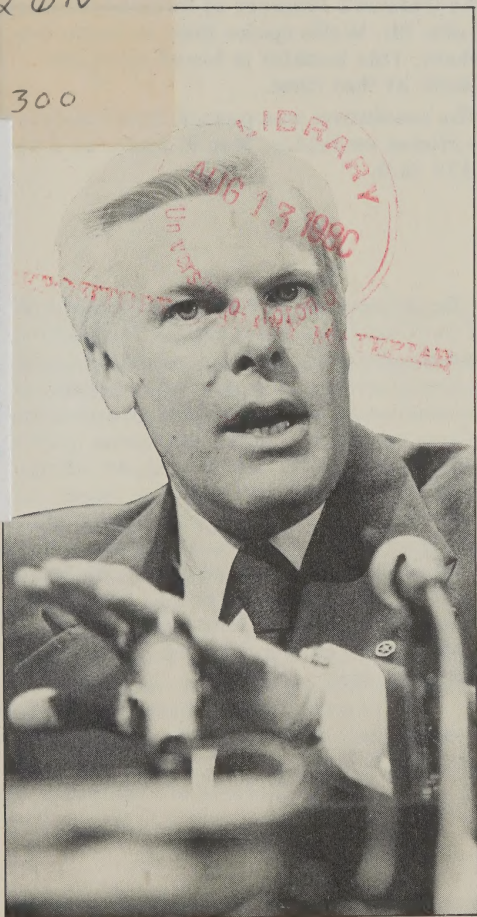


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Hon. Thomas L. Wells
Minister of Intergovernmental
Affairs

Beginning May 5, 1980, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario held an historic week-long Debate on Confederation

The Resolution before the House is reprinted here.

As Ontario's Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Mr. Wells spoke first, to begin the Debate. This booklet is based upon his address at that time.

The resolution was passed unanimously in the House on Friday, May 9, 1980, by a vote of 111 to 0.

Mr. Davis (seconded by Mr. Smith (Hamilton West) and Mr. Cassidy) — Resolution — That. we the Legislative Assembly of Ontario commit ourselves, as our highest priority, to support full negotiation of a new constitution to satisfy the diverse aspirations of all Canadians, and to replace the "status quo" which is clearly unacceptable: And further, we affirm our opposition to the negotiation of "sovereignty-association"; And, therefore, we appeal to all Quebeckers to join with other Canadians in building this national constitution; And further, we hereby appoint a Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario on Constitutional Reform, to consider and report with despatch on ways to achieve this objective.

Mr. Davis (secondée par M. Smith (Hamilton West) et M. Cassidy — Resolution — QU'IL SOIT RESOLU QUE, nous de l'Assemblée Législative de l'Ontario nous engageons, en priorité de première instance, à appuyer la négociation complète d'une nouvelle constitution pouvant satisfaire les diverses aspirations de tous les canadiens et pour remplacer le statu quo qui est clairement inacceptable; DE PLUS, nous affirmons notre opposition à la négociation de la souveraineté-association; EN CONSEQUENCE, nous lançons un appel aux québécois pour qu'ils se joignent aux autres canadiens dans l'élaboration de cette nouvelle constitution nationale; DE PLUS, nous nommons par la présente un comité spécial de l'Assemblée Législative de l'Ontario sur la Reforme Constitutionnelle pour qu'il prenne en considération les moyens d'atteindre cet objectif et qu'ils nous fassent rapport dans le plus bref délai.

This resolution represents the position of the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario and, I am sure, that of the other two Parties as well.

It is a message which we want to send to the people of Quebec from the people of Ontario.

Seldom do we, as Members of this House, have the opportunity to address ourselves to a resolution such as this, the significance of which extends well beyond our accustomed mandate and familiar boundaries, to all provinces and parts of Canada.

But then it is not often that the elected representatives of the province and people of Ontario have before them a resolution with implications of such fundamental concern as the preservation of Canada itself.

This is, then, a rare and unusual moment for us.

The last time this House dealt specifically with a resolution dealing with Confederation was on May 18, 1967, when the House strongly supported the proposal that the Government convene a *Confederation of Tomorrow Conference*. That conference was held six months later, in November of 1967.

An historic turning point

Passage of this resolution will be an historic moment in the history of this Legislature. It could represent a turning point in the prolonged, protracted and frustrating attempts of the past to achieve a renewed and strengthened Confederation.

To achieve this, however, will require our best efforts and energies, the goodwill and co-operation of others, and a dedication and determination throughout. We would do ourselves a great disservice were we to leave any doubts about our purpose or determination; we must convey our sincere belief in the message contained in the resolution, and our commitment to it.

There is really only one issue before us in this debate — *What actions are we prepared to take in order to keep Canada together?* — for it is by our deeds, as well as our words, that we shall be known as people and governments who laid down a new foundation for national understanding.

This is important, because there are some who do not share our commitment to Canada. I know from my continuing contacts and visits in Quebec that there are those who look towards Ontario for any signs of resignation, weariness or uncertainty on this issue.

Status quo not acceptable

There are also those who believe, or would like to believe, that Ontario is reluctant to explore fully and willingly the possibility of significant Constitutional change, much less champion it, because they feel that Ontario has long been the principal beneficiary of the status quo.

This view — that we in Ontario are likely, if not certain, to be selfish and self-seeking in the search for a new Constitution and a renewed federalism — is simply not correct.

Such a view would perhaps come naturally to those who do not see themselves as Canadians first and foremost, and who do not see their future in a united Canada. But while it may be useful for these people to suggest that Ontario simply wants to keep things the way they are, the facts indisputably prove otherwise.

For as long as I can remember, Ontario has been a province and a people in the vanguard of reform. We have pioneered social and other reforms in this country, and have supported many constructive initiatives for Constitutional change.

Over the last dozen years or so, few other provinces in Canada have given as much of their time and attention, or spent as much of their resources, on the subject of a renewed Confederation as has Ontario.

In the Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs alone, there are many reports and papers representing extensive and ongoing thought and study, all directed towards Constitutional change and reform. Any reasonable person who knows what Ontario has done in this field would never suggest that we are reluctant to change the status quo.

In fact, a reasonable person would come to precisely the opposite conclusion.

We in this province are personally and collectively committed to refashioning our country in such a way as to heal our major historical wounds and to strengthen all parts of Canada. We will not cease our pursuit of this Number One national priority until the task is successfully completed. The status quo is as unacceptable to Ontario as is sovereignty-association.

Long-standing allies

Much has been said recently, by the proponents of sovereignty-association, about the struggle which Quebec has had to wage within Canadian federalism. They have failed to mention, however, that Quebec has rarely been alone in its fight.

Even the most cursory survey of the evolution and development of Canadian federalism reveals that Ontario and Quebec have, more often than not, been partners in shaping Canada. Through the years, in many discussions to advance the cause of Quebec within Confederation, Ontario has in fact been Quebec's greatest ally.

Ever since 1867, our two provinces together have resisted repeated efforts by the federal government to undermine provincial competence in fields of jurisdiction which the Fathers of Confederation clearly assigned to the provinces. On some occasions Quebec led the fight, and Ontario weighed in with its whole-hearted support. Other times Ontario led the way, and Quebec offered its solidarity in the cause.

The result, over time, has been a stronger country, with governments better able to respond effectively to the needs of the people.

Great leaders of the past

The growth and development of Canada, from its tenuous beginnings to the enviable prosperity and peace we enjoy today, has not come about merely through the dry vocabulary of Constitutional discussion or economic theory. No, our past comes alive in the flesh and blood of the powerful builders of our country.

I think of the great champions of Quebec, like Mercier, Lesage and Johnson. Their strength and dedication shaped Quebec and Canada.

Ontario, too, is proud of the contributions of its leaders — like Mowat, Ferguson, Drew, Frost, Robarts and, today, William Davis.

If these leaders of both Ontario and Quebec had not shown the capacity to work together, would Canada have attained the quality of life that is the envy of much of the world today? I think not.

This co-operation between our two Provinces goes back years before Confederation. Our history and our people are long joined.

When the Fathers of Confederation created this country in 1867, they wrote a Constitution that reflected this history, taking into account both the duality of its cultures and the economic and social diversity that existed in the four original provinces.

The father of provincial rights

Sir John A. Macdonald threw himself into the task of nation-building by creating a national economy and binding together the various regions of the country with a network of railways and canals. But

Sir John A. sometimes stretched the bounds of the Confederation agreement itself. When he did, Oliver Mowat of Ontario was always quick to point out his lapse.

Mowat was Premier of Ontario from 1872 to 1896, and he is considered the father of provincial rights in Canada. But his resistance to federal encroachment was not based on parochialism or want of vision.

No, he believed that the best way to develop a new national spirit was by encouraging its growth out of the older, deeper loyalties that were embodied in the provinces which constituted Canada. For example, he asserted provincial control over natural resources, and carried through to victory in the courts many constitutional challenges.

When Premier Mercier of Quebec called the first interprovincial conference in 1887, Mowat backed him up. Together, they sought to preserve the right of the provinces to legislate in areas assigned to them by the British North America Act.

Canada in the late 19th century was as much shaped by these two tough-minded Premiers, Mercier and Mowat, as by their better-known federal counterpart.

In the book *The Canadians* (Part 1), published by Macmillan, there is the following assessment:

"The exuberance that prevailed on the purely provincial scene in Ontario was given increased emphasis by the success of the contest over Dominion and provincial powers that Mowat waged with Macdonald. The great Conservative chieftain, largely by the judicious exercise of Ottawa's powers of patronage, had been able to keep the smaller provinces in accord with the policies of the federal government. But Ontario proved her bigness by an ability to fight Ottawa... Mowat was the first of a long line of Canadian provincial premiers to acquire great repute by boldly and successfully challenging the government at Ottawa."

Of course, as I have said, he was joined at the time by Premier Mercier of Quebec.

The spirit of co-operation and solidarity which these men created between Ontario and Quebec was passed on to succeeding generations of leaders in both provinces. In the 1920's Premier Taschereau of Quebec and Premier Ferguson of Ontario united in urging the development of hydro projects on the Ottawa River, and in scuttling the federal government's plans to unilaterally amend the constitution.

Depression and war brought change

The Depression and World War II prompted the federal government to move aggressively into social welfare and tax fields that were within the jurisdiction of the provinces. In the reconstruction period following the war, and throughout the 1950's, it was Maurice Duplessis of Quebec and George Drew and Leslie Frost of Ontario who sought to redress the imbalance in Canadian federalism that had been caused by economic calamity and war.

The provinces were faced with growing demands for highways, education, health care and pensions, but the federal government had appropriated the tax fields which could have provided the revenues for these services.

Throughout the late 1940's and the 1950's, Ontario and Quebec demanded a greater tax share that would enable them to fulfill their responsibilities, and it was through their joint efforts that some fiscal relief was finally provided.

The 1960 election victory of Jean Lesage in Quebec marked the beginning of a decade of intense debate on difficult federal-provincial issues. Again, Ontario and Quebec were united in their common cause. Premier Lesage initiated the resumption of the long-dormant practice of holding interprovincial conferences, and the provinces were able to share their individual experiences in dealing with the problems they faced.

Ontario Premier John Robarts also recognized the danger inherent in the increasingly difficult relations between Quebec and the federal government. Calling on the long tradition of mutual support between Ontario and Quebec, he refused to see Quebec isolated in its demands for tax reform and control over social programs, both of which were properly within provincial jurisdiction.

1967 conference was bold move

In addition to these problems, Ontario also recognized the challenges posed by Canada's cultural duality and the need for fundamental constitutional renewal. In convening the *Confederation of Tomorrow Conference* in 1967, Premier Robarts gave concrete expression to the concern about the country's future, which was shared by both Ontario and Quebec.

It was a bold move, and one whose ramifications continue today.

As Quebec Premier Daniel Johnson said:

"I am confident that this Conference will be the starting point for a new Canada in which linguistic

and cultural duality will no longer be a source of misunderstanding and conflict, but a factor for cooperation, mutual enrichment and assertion of our Canadian identity."

The shared perceptions of our two provinces were further reinforced in June of 1969 when John Robarts and Jean-Jacques Bertrand, who was then the Premier of Quebec, signed the *Ontario-Quebec Agreement for Co-operation and Exchange* establishing the *Ontario-Quebec Permanent Commission*. This body continues in active existence today, initiating many joint activities between our provinces, mainly of a cultural and educational nature.

Following the *Confederation of Tomorrow Conference* came a period of concerted effort to bring about Constitutional change, as we crossed the threshold into the 1970's.

"The impossible" was almost achieved

In 1971, at the Constitutional Conference held in Victoria, the provincial Premiers and the Prime Minister of Canada believed that they had achieved what many people said was impossible — namely, a significant start towards major changes to the Canadian Constitution acceptable to all.

Unfortunately, it was not to be — because Quebec, for reasons known only to itself, later decided not to ratify it.

It was not for want of effort or dedication that the Victoria Charter failed to become reality. I was there, as Minister of Social and Family Services, as was Premier Davis — and we can attest to the fact that the work was intense and, we thought, successful.

Had we achieved success in 1971, perhaps the course of events through the late 1970's and now into the 1980's, would have been different.

Despite the disappointing setback in 1971, however, Ontario has kept up its efforts to maintain a close working relationship with our sister province.

This brief review of Ontario-Quebec relationships through the years is a reminder of our shared heritage. Those who highlight only the difficulties which Quebec has experienced in Confederation, and its differences with the rest of Canada, have their own motives for doing so. But I appeal to all Quebecers to recall a more positive tradition — the close co-operation that Ontario and Quebec have always enjoyed as partners in Canada.

Separation would end co-operative spirit

The roots of our shared experience lie deep in the

past. Our respect for each other has grown through shared adversity and shared good fortune. It is a tradition that we must continue to nourish.

But let me make it clear that it is a tradition shared by *Canadians*. Let me make it even more clear: *it would not continue between Ontario and a sovereign Quebec.*

Ontarians will not calmly accept the dismemberment of their country — and then sit down willingly and work out economic arrangements with the very government which caused the rupture in the first place.

As I have noted, Ontarians have worked closely with Quebecers, as have their governments, on many matters of common concern to us, as Canadians, over the years. Were Quebec to secede, it would be naive to expect that the same spirit of co-operation would automatically continue, even though we would continue to be geographic neighbours.

I believe that I speak for the vast majority of Ontario residents when I say that no kind of separation of Quebec from Canada could be amicable. The Parti Quebecois government is fooling itself if it believes that life would be “business as usual” after such a drastic event.

Ontarians are not unemotional when challenged on matters about which they care deeply — such as their country.

Positive response to need for change

This absolute rejection of sovereignty-association means that it is of the utmost importance that Ontario respond clearly and positively to the calls for change to our federal system which have been coming from Quebecers for years — and which are now coming from other provinces as well.

I want to use this occasion to reiterate to the people of Quebec that Ontario is prepared to go to the negotiating table at any time and in any place to achieve Constitutional reform within a united Canada — and to do so in a serious and determined manner.

Ontario is prepared to negotiate and bargain on any legitimate Constitutional matters. We are prepared to give ground, as others must do also, and we will negotiate in good faith.

But Ontario will not give ground on Canada or on the preservation of a nation from sea to sea — a Canada with a common citizenship, a free movement of people, a free movement of goods and the products of our peoples’ creative energies moving across this country among all jurisdictions.

No, we will not give ground on Canada.

We have a good base on which to undertake fruitful Constitutional negotiation — buttressed by studies such as those of the *Task Force on Canadian Unity*, the *Ontario Advisory Committee on Confederation* and the *Quebec Liberal Party Constitutional Committee*.

NO to sovereignty-association

I believe that we can achieve a fundamental restructuring of our Constitution in a way that preserves the strength of our nation. But there must be no doubt in anyone's mind on one key point: while there is no item that would be excluded from the agenda of Constitutional change, there would be no negotiating sovereignty-association.

Ontarians would simply not negotiate anything which would bring about the destruction or fragmentation of their country.

However, it is quite clear to me that if there ever was once support for the status quo in our evolving federation, it has long since vanished. All governments in Canada — with the apparent exception of the Parti Quebecois — are now solidly committed to devising a new Constitution for Canada.

So it is *NO* to sovereignty-association, *NO* to the status quo, and an emphatic *YES* to a new Constitution that is strongly supportive of all parts of Canada.

We want all of the governments of Canada to sit down as soon as possible to start negotiating that Constitution, within four to six weeks following the referendum of May 20, I would suggest.

The task will be long and difficult. But I think that the people of Quebec should ponder the fact that a new acceptable Constitution is far more feasible and achievable than is sovereignty-association.

Meantime, we are not here today to tell the people of Quebec how to vote on May 20. That is for each resident of the Province to decide for himself or herself.

But based on our long-standing friendship and co-operation, we want Quebecers to know what we deeply feel on this matter.

It is a small but important anomaly, but those who vote *Yes* in the referendum will negate the thrust for Constitutional change, while those who vote *No* will all but ensure its success.

In other words, there is no better way of ensuring the certain preservation of the status quo in this country for years to come than a *Yes* vote in the referendum.

That, of course, is the reality of our opposition to sovereignty-association, a term which Premier Davis has correctly called *separatism by stealth*.

For myself, and I would expect others to say the same, I would not remain a member of any government or be a supporter of any political party which would negotiate what would amount to the destruction of Canada as a nation. I do not think that any of the other 124 Members of this House would say anything different.

That is the ultimate practicality on this matter.

In speaking in support of the resolution that is before this House — and mindful of the tensions and uncertainties abroad in our country — one can only conclude that what we do now, in the weeks and months ahead, will be as vital in its consequence to Ontario and to Canada than all that has gone on before or will likely come after.

It is therefore important that Ontario speak and act in singular accord of mind, spirit and heart — as a signal to all Canadians of our resolve to help find a more harmonious and creative partnership in a renewed and united Canada.

**Additional copies of this
booklet are available from:**

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